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SUBJECT: MUTED IRAQI REACTION TO SPD

Classified By: PolCounselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 25th the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) held a closed session to discuss the Strategic Partnership Declaration (SPD) between the U.S. and Iraq. Despite scattered complaints, the overall reaction among MPs to the SPD has been muted, reflecting CoR members' preoccupation with other issues and their recognition of Iraq's continued dependence on the U.S. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Hassan al-Shemmeri, CoR member and Fadhila head, said that he personally considered the SPD "beneficial" and a good first step to relieving Iraq of its political dependency. However, he said as a political party Fadhilah would oppose the declaration to protest PM Maliki's government, which Shemmeri denounced as non-representative. He added that Tawafuq was considering a similar step, while the Sadrists would oppose any agreement with the U.S., because "they consider themselves a religious and not a political party."

¶3. (C) Tanya Gilly, CoR member, expressed anger that CoR members were not told in advance of the SPD. She dismissed the declaration as deliberately vague and said she had no objection to the SPD itself but resented the secretive nature of the negotiations and the fact that CoR members never received a copy of the text. On a more positive note, Deputy PM Barham Saleh said the SPD "should be celebrated as a major success. Absolutely."

¶4. (C) Tawafuq leader Adnan Dulaymi said Tawafuq supported the principles of the SPD. He noted that VP Hashimi detailed his bloc's views on the strategic partnership and coming bilateral negotiations in an exchange of letters with Ambassador Crocker. He confirmed that VP Hashimi signed on to the declaration on behalf of the Sunni bloc on November 26 without further conditions. However, he questioned whether PM Maliki could sign an agreement on behalf of the Iraqi people. Hiwar leader Salih al-Mutlaq asked the same question in a November 27 interview on the Baghdad Channel.

¶5. (C) Comment: Overall the reaction to the SPD was muted. In recent parliamentary sessions CoR members have been preoccupied with other issues, including alleged mistreatment at Coalition checkpoints and resolving the confusion over multiple drafts of the 2008 federal budget. The absence of a strong reaction also reflects a recognition among politicians that the Iraqi government remains dependent on a continued U.S. presence. End Comment.

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